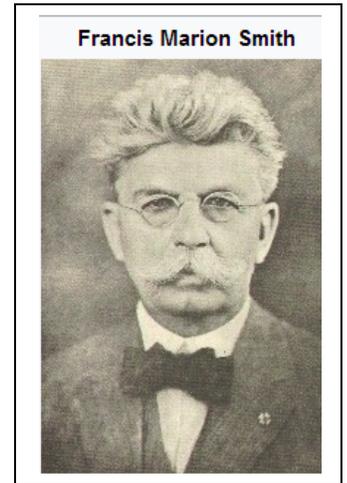




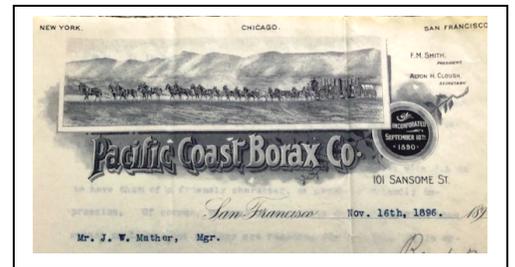
The man who be—and was—king. Excerpts of letters from Francis Marion Smith to Joseph Wakeman Mather

In an August 7, 1898 letter to his father, Stephen Mather wrote, “I hear that Mr. Smith is getting near the consummation of his pet project to consolidate the borax business of the world, absorbing the Turkish and So American companies...The trouble with Smith is he doesn’t think anyone else but himself has any right in the borax business...”



Francis Marion Smith (Feb 2, 1846-Aug 27, 1931) was known as “The Borax King.” He founded the Pacific Borax Company in 1890 and for a number of years was Joseph Wakeman Mather’s employer as well as Stephen Mather’s employer for a period of time.

In the Homestead attic is a file folder containing several hundred letters received by Joseph Wakeman Mather in the 1890s, including ten from F.M. Smith. Although some letters reflect his appreciation of Joseph Wakeman Mather, others reveal the commanding and aggressive stance that earned Stephen’s approbation. A few brief excerpts...



From an August 31, 1894 letter

Dear Sir:-

*...For reasons which I will name below I will ask you to reconsider and withdraw your application for an increase of salary...
...this is not a good time to ask for an increase of salary...I think I fully recognize and appreciate your faithful service and the care you have shown in the general management of the business, but I feel that your present compensation is sufficient for the services performed. For the last year or two you have had the assistance of your son in conducting the business; the hours you devote to the business are short, and your position is a very independent one...
...I thought owing to your son’s knowledge of the newspaper business we could secure with his assistance, free advertising to a large extent, but this has not been accomplished in any appreciable way...”*

From a September 13, 1896 letter

Dear Sir:-

...You surprised me the other day very much in putting in your resignation as you were evidently sincere in your wish to withdraw while you are in good health...Your long, earnest and conscientious work while with the Borax Company has made your position such that it will be difficult to fill your place...

...I suppose you will become a recluse and spend all your time at your Darien home but as long as you are happy with your surroundings and as that is what makes life anyway surely your friends cannot complain. I have written Stephen in regard to your wishes...

From an October 29, 1896 letter

Dear Sir:-

*Regarding your wishes as to disposition of your borax stock...
...I realize as you are going out of the company's employment you naturally wish to dispose of your stock, and with this in mind I am making you the above offer, which I believe is a very satisfactory one...*

From a November 12, 1896 letter

Dear Sir:

...You asked for a proposition and I made one, and I think you will agree with me that I am entitled to an answer and that you should let me know definitely, your decision...

From a November 24, 1896 letter

Dear Sir:

...I will suggest that your investment in borax stock is a very small one indeed, if you will take into consideration the dividends you have received from it. I do not think you have anything to complain of as to your investment in that direction...

...Please consider my proposition of some weeks ago withdrawn...

This letter is the final one in Joseph Wakeman Mather's assembled letters from Francis M. Smith. A few years after his father's departure, Stephen Mather left the Pacific Coast Borax Co. and in 1903 formed the Thorkildsen-Mather Borax Company with Thomas Thorkildsen.

